

A CUP OF TEA¹

By MAXWELL STRUTHERS BURT

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YOUNG Burnaby was late. He was always late. One associated him with lateness and certain eager, impossible excuses — he was always coming from somewhere to somewhere, and his "train was delayed," or his huge space-devouring motor "had broken down." You imagined him, enveloped in dust and dusk, his face disguised beyond human semblance, tearing up and down the highways of the world; or else in the corridor of a train, biting his nails with poorly concealed impatience. As a matter of fact, when you saw him, he was beyond average correctly attired, and his manner was suppressed, as if to conceal the keenness that glowed behind his dark eyes and kept the color mounting and receding in his sunburnt cheeks. All of which, except the keenness, was a strange thing in a man who spent half his life shooting big game and exploring. But then, one imagined that Burnaby on the trail and Burnaby in a town were two entirely different persons. He liked his life with a thrust to it, and in a great city there are so many thrusts that, it is to be supposed, one of Burnaby's temperament hardly has hours enough in a day to appreciate all of them and at the same time keep appointments.

On this February night, at all events, he was extremely late, even beyond his custom, and Mrs. Malcolm, having waited as long as she possibly could, sighed amusedly and told her man to announce dinner. There were only three others besides herself in the drawing-room, Masters

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— Sir John Masters, the English financier — and his wife, and Mrs. Selden, dark, a little silent, with a flushed, finely cut face and a slightly sorrow-stricken mouth. And already these people had reached the point where talk is interesting. People did in Mrs. Malcolm's house. One went there with anticipation, and came away with the delightful, a little vague, exhilaration that follows an evening where the perfection of the material background — lights, food, wine, flowers — has been almost forgotten in the thrill of contact with real persons, a rare enough circumstance in a period when the dullest people entertain the most. In the presence of Mrs. Malcolm even the very great forgot the suspicions that grow with success and became themselves, and, having come once, came again vividly, overlooking other people who really had more right to their attentions than had she.

This was the case with Sir John Masters. And he was a very great man indeed, not only as the world goes but in himself: a short, heavy man, with a long, heavy head crowned with vibrant, still entirely dark hair and pointed by a black, carefully kept beard, above which arose — “arose” is the word, for Sir John's face was architectural — a splendid, slightly curved nose — a buccaneering nose; a nose that, willy-nilly, would have made its possessor famous. One suspected, far back in the yeoman strain, a hurried, possibly furtive marriage with gypsy or Jew; a sudden blossoming into lyricism on the part of a soil-stained Masters. Certainly from somewhere Sir John had inherited an imagination which was not insular. Dangerous men, these Sir Johns, with their hooked noses and their lyric eyes!

Mrs. Malcolm described him as fascinating. There was about him that sense of secret power that only politicians, usually meretriciously, and diplomats, and, above all, great bankers as a rule possess; yet he seldom talked of his own life, or the mission that had brought him to New York; instead, in his sonorous, slightly Hebraic voice, he drew other people on to talk about themselves,

or else, to artists and writers and their sort, discovered an amazing, discouraging knowledge of the trades by which they earned their living. "One feels," said Mrs. Malcolm, "that one is eyeing a sensitive python. He uncoils beautifully."

They were seated at the round, candle-lit table, the rest of the room in partial shadow, Sir John looking like a lost Rembrandt, and his blonde wife, with her soft English face, like a rose-and-gray portrait by Reynolds, when Burnaby strode in upon them . . . strode in upon them, and then, as if remembering the repression he believed in, hesitated, and finally advanced quietly toward Mrs. Malcolm. One could smell the snowy February night still about him.

"I'm so sorry," he said. "I —"

"You broke down, I suppose," said Mrs. Malcolm, "or the noon train from Washington was late for the first time in six years. What do you do in Washington, anyway? Moon about the Smithsonian?"

"No," said Burnaby, as he sank into a chair and unfolded his napkin. "Y'see — well, that is — I ran across a fellow — an Englishman — who knew a chap I met last summer up on the Francis River — I didn't exactly meet him, that is, I ran into him, and it wasn't the Francis River really, it was the Upper Liara, a branch that comes in from the northwest. Strange, wasn't it? — this fellow, this Englishman, got to talking about tea, and that reminded me of the whole thing." He paused on the last word and, with a peculiar habit that is much his own, stared across the table at Lady Masters, but over and through her, as if that pretty pink-and-white woman had entirely disappeared, — and the warm shadows behind her, — and in her place were no one could guess what vistas of tumbling rivers and barren tundras.

"Tea!" ejaculated Mrs. Malcolm.

Burnaby came back to the flower-scented circle of light.

"Yes," he said soberly, "tea. Exactly."

Mrs. Malcolm's delicate eyebrows rose to a point. "What," she asked, in the tones of delighted motherhood overlaid with a slight exasperation which she habitually used toward Burnaby, "has tea got to do with a man you met on the Upper Liara last summer and a man you met this afternoon? Why tea?"

"A lot," said Burnaby cryptically, and proceeded to apply himself to his salad, for he had refused the courses his lateness had made him miss. "Y'see," he said, after a moment's reflection, "it was this way — and it's worth telling, for it's queer. I ran into this Terhune this afternoon at a club — a big, blond Englishman who's been in the army, but now he's out making money. Owns a tea house in London. Terhune & Terhune — perhaps you know them?" He turned to Sir John.

"Yes, very well. I imagine this is Arthur Terhune."

"That's the man. Well, his being in tea and that sort of thing got me to telling him about an adventure I had last summer, and, the first crack out of the box, he said he remembered the other chap perfectly — had known him fairly well at one time. Odd, wasn't it, when you come to think of it? A big, blond, freshly bathed Englishman in a club, and that other man away up there!"

"And the other man? Is he in the tea business too?" asked Mrs. Selden. She was interested by now, leaning across the table, her dark eyes catching light from the candles. It was something — to interest Mrs. Selden.

"No," said Burnaby abruptly. "No. He's in no business at all, except going to perdition. Y'see, he's a squaw-man — a big, black squaw-man, with a nose like a Norman king's. The sort of person you imagine in evening clothes in the Carleton lounge. He might have been anything but what he is."

"I wonder," said Sir John, "why we do that sort of thing so much more than other nations? Our very best, too. It's odd."

"It was odd enough the way it happened to me, anyhow," said Burnaby. "I'd been knocking around up there all summer, just an Indian and myself — around what they call Fort Francis and the Pelly Lakes, and toward the end of August we came down the Liara in a canoe. We were headed for Lower Post on the Francis, and it was all very lovely until, one day, we ran into a rapid, a devil of a thing, and my Indian got drowned."

"How dreadful!" murmured Lady Masters.

"It was," agreed Burnaby; "but it might have been worse — for me, that is. It couldn't have been much worse for the poor devil of an Indian, could it? But I had a pretty fair idea of the country, and had only about fifty miles to walk, and a little waterproof box of grub turned up out of the wreck, so I wasn't in any danger of starving. It was lonely, though — it's lonely enough country, anyhow, and of course I couldn't help thinking about that Indian and the way big rapids roar. I couldn't sleep when night came — saw black rocks sticking up out of white water like the fangs of a mad dog. I was pretty near the horrors, I guess. So you can imagine I wasn't sorry when, about four o'clock of the next afternoon, I came back to the river again and a teepee standing up all by itself on a little pine-crowned bluff. In front of the teepee was an old squaw — she wasn't very old, really, but you know how Indians get — boiling something over a fire in a big pot. 'How!' I said, and she grunted. 'If you'll lend me part of your fire, I'll make some tea,' I continued. 'And if you're good, I'll give you some when it's done.' Tea was one of the things cached in the little box that had been saved. She moved the pot to one side, so I judged she understood, and I trotted down to the river for water and set to work. As you can guess, I was pretty anxious for any kind of conversation by then, so after a while I said brightly: 'All alone?' She grunted again and pointed over her shoulder to the teepee. 'Well, seeing you're so interested,' said I, 'and

that the tea's done, we'll all go inside and ask your man to a party — if you'll dig up two tin cups. I've got one of my own.' She raised the flap of the teepee and I followed her. I could see she wasn't a person who wasted words. Inside a little fire was smouldering, and seated with his back to us was a big, broad-shouldered buck, with a dark blanket wrapped around him. 'Your good wife,' I began cheerily — I was getting pretty darned sick of silence — 'has allowed me to make some tea over your fire. Have some? I'm shipwrecked from a canoe and on my way to Lower Post. If you don't understand what I say, it doesn't make the slightest difference, but for God's sake grunt — just once, to show you're interested.' He grunted. 'Thanks!' I said, and poured the tea into the three tin cups. The squaw handed one to her buck. Then I sat down.

"There was nothing to be heard but the gurgling of the river outside and the rather noisy breathing we three made as we drank; and then — very clearly, just as if we'd been sitting in an English drawing-room — in the silence a voice said: 'By Jove, that's the first decent cup of tea I've had in ten years!' Yes, just that! 'By Jove, that's the first decent cup of tea I've had in ten years!' I looked at the buck, but he hadn't moved, and then I looked at the squaw, and she was still squatting and sipping her tea, and then I said, very quietly, for I knew my nerves were still ragged, 'Did any one speak?' and the buck turned slowly and looked me up and down, and I saw the nose I was talking about — the nose like a Norman king's. I was rattled, I admit; I forgot my manners. 'You're English!' I gasped out; and the buck said very sweetly: 'That's none of your damned business.'"

Burnaby paused and looked about the circle of attentive faces. "That's all. But it's enough, isn't it? To come out of nothing, going nowheres, and run into a dirty Indian who says: 'By Jove, that's the first decent cup of tea I've had in ten years!' And then along

comes this Terhune and says that he knows the man."

Mrs. Malcolm raised her chin from the hand that had been supporting it. "I don't blame you," she said, "for being late."

"And this man," interrupted Sir John's sonorous voice, "this squaw-man, did he tell you anything about himself?"

Burnaby shook his head. "Not likely," he answered. "I tried to draw him out, but he wasn't drawable. Finally he said: 'If you'll shut your damned mouth I'll give you two dirty blankets to sleep on. If you won't, I'll kick you out of here.' The next morning I pulled out, leaving him crouched over the little teepee fire nursing his knees. But I hadn't gone twenty yards when he came to the flap and called out after me: 'I say!' I turned about sullenly. His dirty face had a queer, cracked smile on it. 'Look here! Do you — where did you get that tea from, anyway? I — there's a lot of skins I've got; I don't suppose you'd care to trade, would you?' I took the tea out of the air-tight box and put it on the ground. Then I set off down river. Henderson, the factor at Lower Post, told me a little about him: his name — it wasn't assumed, it seems; and that he'd been in the country about fifteen years, going from bad to worse. He was certainly at 'worse' when I saw him." Burnaby paused and stared across the table again with his curious, far-away look. "Beastly, isn't it?" he said, as if to himself. "Cold up there now, too! The snow must be deep." He came back to the present. "And I suppose, you know," he said, smiling deprecatingly at Mrs. Selden, "he's just as fond of flowers and lights and things as we are."

Mrs. Selden shivered.

"Fonder!" said Sir John. "Probably fonder. That sort is. It's the poets of the world who can't write poetry who go to smash that way. They ought to take a term at business, and"—he reflected—"the business men, of course, at poetry." He regarded Burnaby with his in-

scrutable eyes, in the depths of which danced little flecks of light.

"What did you say this man's name was?" asked Lady Masters, in her soft voice. She had an extraordinary way of advancing, with a timid rush, as it were, into the foreground, and then receding again, melting back into the shadows. She rarely ever spoke without a sensation of astonishment making itself felt. "She is like a mist," thought Mrs. Malcolm.

"Bewsher," said Burnaby — "Geoffrey Boisselier Bewsher. Quite a name, isn't it? He was in the cavalry. His family are rather swells in an old-fashioned way. He is the fifth son — or seventh, or whatever it is — of a baronet and, Terhune says, was very much in evidence about London twenty-odd years ago. Terhune used to see him in clubs, and every now and then dining out. Although he himself, of course, was a much younger man. Very handsome he was, too, Terhune said, and a favorite. And then one day he just disappeared — got out — no one knows exactly why. Terhune doesn't. Lost his money, or a woman, or something like that. The usual thing, I suppose. I — You didn't hurt yourself, did you?" . . .

He had paused abruptly and was looking across the table; for there had been a little tinkle and a crash of breaking glass, and now a pool of champagne was forming beside Lady Masters's plate, and finding its way in a thin thread of gold along the cloth. There was a moment's silence, and then she advanced again out of the shadows with her curious soft rush. "How clumsy I am!" she murmured. "My arm — My bracelet! I — I'm so sorry!" She looked swiftly about her, and then at Burnaby. "Oh, no! I'm not cut, thanks!" Her eyes held a pained embarrassment. He caught the look, and her eyelids flickered and fell before his gaze, and then, as the footman repaired the damage, she sank back once more into the half-light beyond the radiance of the candles. "How shy she is!" thought Burnaby. "So

many of these English women are. She's an important woman in her own right, too." He studied her furtively.

Into the soft silence came Sir John's carefully modulated voice. "Barbara and I," he explained, "will feel this very much. We both knew Bewsher." His eyes became somber. "This is very distressing," he said abruptly.

"By Jove!" ejaculated Burnaby, and raised his head like an alert hound.

"How odd it all is!" said Mrs. Malcolm. But she was wondering why men are so queer with their wives—resent so much the slightest social clumsiness on their part, while in other women—provided the offense is not too great—it merely amuses them. Even the guarded manners of Sir John had been disturbed. For a moment he had been very angry with the shadow that bore his name; one could tell by the swift glance he had cast in her direction. After all, upsetting a glass of champagne was a very natural sequel to a story such as Burnaby had told, a story about a former acquaintance—perhaps friend.

Sir John thoughtfully helped himself to a spoonful of his dessert before he looked up; when he did so he laid down his spoon and sat back in his chair with the manner of a man who has made a sudden decision. "No," he said, and an unexpected little smile hovered about his lips, "it isn't so odd. Bewsher was rather a figure of a man twenty years ago. Shall I tell you his history?"

To Mrs. Malcolm, watching with alert, humorous eyes, there came a curious impression, faint but distinct, like wind touching her hair; as if, that is, a door into the room had opened and shut. She leaned forward, supporting her chin in her hand.

"Of course," she said.

Sir John twisted between his fingers the stem of his champagne-glass and studied thoughtfully the motes of light at the heart of the amber wine. "You see," he

began thoughtfully, "it's such a difficult story to tell — difficult because it took twenty-five — and, now that Mr. Burnaby has furnished the sequel, forty-five years — to live; and difficult because it is largely a matter of psychology. I can only give you the high lights, as it were. You must fill in the rest for yourselves. You must imagine, that is, Bewsher and this other fellow — this Morton. I can't give you his real name — it is too important; you would know it. No, it isn't obviously dramatic. And yet —" his voice suddenly became vibrant — "such things compose, as a matter of fact, the real drama of the world. It —" he looked about the table swiftly and leaned forward, and then, as if interrupting himself, "but what *was* obviously dramatic," he said — and the little dancing sparks in the depths of his eyes were peculiarly noticeable — "was the way I, of all people, heard it. Yes. You see, I heard it at a dinner party like this, in London; and Morton — the man himself — told the story." He paused, and with half-closed eyes studied the effect of his announcement.

"You mean — ?" asked Burnaby.

"Exactly." Sir John spoke with a certain cool eagerness. "He sat up before all those people and told the inner secrets of his life; and of them all I was the only one who suspected the truth. Of course, he was comparatively safe, none of them knew him well except myself, but think of it! The bravado — the audacity! Rather magnificent, wasn't it?" He sank back once more in his chair.

Mrs. Malcolm agreed. "Yes," she said. "Magnificent and insulting."

Sir John smiled. "My dear lady," he asked, "doesn't life consist largely of insults from the strong to the weak?"

"And were all these people so weak, then?"

"No, in their own way they were fairly important, I suppose, but compared to Morton they were weak — very weak — Ah, yes! I like this custom of smoking at

table. Thanks!" He selected a cigarette deliberately, and stooped toward the proffered match. The flame illumined the swarthy curve of his beard and the heavy lines of his dark face. "You see," he began, straightening up in his chair, "the whole thing — that part of it, and the part I'm to tell — is really, if you choose, an allegory of strength, of strength and weakness. On the one side Morton — there's strength, sheer, undiluted power, the thing that runs the world; and on the other Bewsher, the ordinary man, with all his mixed-up ideas of right and wrong and the impossible, confused thing he calls a 'code' — Bewsher, and later on the girl. She too is part of the allegory. She represents — what shall I say? A composite portrait of the ordinary young woman? Religion, I suppose. Worldly religion. The religion of most of my good friends in England. A vague but none the less passionate belief in a heaven populated by ladies and gentlemen who dine out with a God who resembles royalty. And coupled with this religion the girl had, of course, as have most of her class, a very distinct sense of her own importance in the world; not that exactly — personally she was over-modest; a sense rather of her importance as a unit of an important family, and a deep-rooted conviction of the fundamental necessity of unimportant things: parties, and class-worship, and the whole jumbled-up order as it is. The usual young woman, that is, if you lay aside her unusual beauty. And, you see, people like Bewsher and the girl haven't much chance against a man like Morton, have they? Do you remember the girl, my dear?" he asked, turning to his wife.

"Yes," murmured Lady Masters.

"Well, then," continued Sir John, "you must imagine this Morton, an ugly little boy of twelve, going up on a scholarship to a great public school — a rather bitter little boy, without any particular prospects ahead of him except those his scholarship held out; and back of him a poor, stunted life, with a mother in it — a sad dehuman-

ized creature, I gathered, who subsisted on the bounty of a niggardly brother. And this, you can understand, was the first thing that made Morton hate virtue devoid of strength. His mother, he told me, was the best woman he had ever known. The world had beaten her unmercifully. His earliest recollection was hearing her cry at night. . . . And there, at the school, he had his first glimpse of the great world that up to then he had only dimly suspected. Dramatic enough in itself, isn't it? — if you can visualize the little dark chap. A common enough drama, too, the Lord knows. We people on top are bequeathing misery to our posterity when we let the Mortons of the world hate the rich. And head and shoulders above the other boys of his age at the school was Bewsher; not that materially, of course, there weren't others more important; Bewsher's family was old and rich as such families go, but he was very much a younger son, and his people lived mostly in the country; yet even then there was something about him — a manner, an adeptness in sports, an unsought popularity, that picked him out; the beginnings of that Norman nose that Mr. Burnaby has mentioned. And here" — Sir John paused and puffed thoughtfully at his cigarette — "is the first high light.

"To begin with, of course, Morton hated Bewsher and all he represented, hated him in a way that only a boy of his nature can; and then, one day — I don't know exactly when it could have been, probably a year or two after he had gone up to school — he began to see quite clearly what this hate meant; began to see that for such as he to hate the Bewshers of the world was the sheerest folly — a luxury far beyond his means. Quaint, wasn't it? In a boy of his age! You can imagine him working it out at night, in his narrow dormitory bed, when the other boys were asleep. You see, he realized, dimly at first, clearly at last, that through Bewsher and his kind lay the hope of Morton and his kind. Nice little boys think the same thing, only they are trained not to admit

it. That was the first big moment of Morton's life, and with the determination characteristic of him he set out to accomplish what he had decided. In England we make our future through our friends, in this country you make it through your enemies. But it wasn't easy for Morton; such tasks never are. He had a good many insults to swallow. In the end, however, from being tolerated he came to be indispensable, and from being indispensable eventually to be liked. He had planned his campaign with care. Carefulness, recklessly carried out, has been, I think, the guiding rule of his life. He had modelled himself on Bewsher; he walked like Bewsher; tried to think like Bewsher — that is, in the less important things of life — and, with the divination that marks his type of man, the little money he had, the little money that as a schoolboy he could borrow, he had spent with precision on clothes and other things that brought him personal distinction; in what people call necessities he starved himself. By the time he was ready to leave school you could hardly have told him from the man he had set out to follow: he was equally well-mannered; equally at his ease; if anything, more conscious of prerogative than Bewsher. He had come to spend most of his holidays at Bewsher's great old house in Gloucestershire. That, too, was an illumination. It showed him what money was made for — the sunny quiet of the place, the wheels of a spacious living that ran so smoothly, the long gardens, the inevitableness of it all. Some day, he told himself, he would have just such a house. He has. It is his mistress. The world has not allowed him much of the poetry that, as you must already see, the man has in him; he takes it out on his place.

“It was in Morton's last year at Oxford, just before his graduation, that the second great moment of his life occurred. He had done well at his college, not a poor college either; and all the while, you must remember, he was borrowing money and running up bills. But this didn't bother him. He was perfectly assured in his own

mind concerning his future. He had counted costs. In that May, Bewsher, who from school had gone to Sandhurst, came up on a visit with two or three other fledgling officers, and they had a dinner in Morton's rooms. It turned into rather a 'rag,' as those things do, and it was there, across a flower-strewn, wine-stained table, that Morton had his second revelation. He wasn't drunk — he never got drunk; the others were. The thing came in upon him slowly, warmingly, like the breeze that stirred the curtains. He felt himself, as never before, a man. You can see him sitting back in his chair, in the smoke and the noise and the foolish singing, cool, his eyes a little closed. He knew now that he had passed the level of these men; yes, even the shining mark Bewsher had set. He had gone on, while they had stood still. To him, he suddenly realized, and to such as he, belonged the heritage of the years, not to these men who thought they held it. These old gray buildings stretching away into the May dusk, the history of a thousand years, were his. These sprawled young aristocrats before him — they, whether they eventually came to know it or not, they, and Bewsher with them — would one day do his bidding: come when he beckoned, go when he sent. It was a big thought, wasn't it, for a man of twenty-two?" Sir John paused and puffed at his cigarette.

"That was the second high light," he continued, "and the third did not come until fifteen years later. Bewsher went into the Indian army — his family had ideas of service — and Morton into a banking-house in London. And there, as deliberately as he had taken them up, he laid aside for the time being all the social perquisites which he had with so much pains acquired. Do you know — he told me that for fifteen years not once had he dined out, except when he thought his ambitions would be furthered by so doing, and then, as one turns on a tap, he turned on the charm he now knew himself to possess. It is not astonishing, is it, when you come to think of it, that eventually he became rich and famous?"

Most people are unwilling to sacrifice their youth to their future. He wasn't. But it wasn't a happy time. He hated it. He paid off his debts, however, and at the end of the fifteen years found himself a big man in a small way, with every prospect of becoming a big man in a big way. Then, of course — such men do — he began to look about him. He wanted wider horizons, he wanted luxury, he wanted a wife; and he wanted them as a starved man wants food. He experienced comparatively little difficulty in getting started. Some of his school and university friends remembered him, and there was a whisper about that he was a man that bore watching. But afterward he stuck. The inner citadel of London is by no means as assailable as the outer fortifications lead one to suppose.

"They say a man never has a desire but there's an angel or a devil to write it down. Morton had hardly made his discovery when Bewsher turned up from India, transferred to a crack cavalry regiment; a sunburnt, cordial Bewsher, devilishly determined to enjoy the fullness of his prime. On his skirts, as he had done once before, Morton penetrated farther and farther into the esoteric heart of society. I'm not sure just how Bewsher felt toward Morton at the time; he liked him, I think; at all events, he had the habit of him. As for Morton, he liked Bewsher as much as he dared; he never permitted himself to like any one too much.

"I don't know how it is with you, but I have noticed again and again that intimate friends are prone to fall in love with the same woman: perhaps it is because they have so many tastes in common; perhaps it is jealousy — I don't know. Anyhow, that is what happened to these two, Morton first, then Bewsher; and it is characteristic that the former mentioned it to no one, while the latter was confidential and expansive. Such men do not deserve women, and yet they are often the very men women fall most in love with. At first the girl had been attracted to Morton, it seems; he intrigued her — no doubt

the sense of power about him; but the handsomer man, when he entered the running, speedily drew ahead. You can imagine the effect of this upon her earlier suitor. It was the first rebuff that for a long time had occurred to him in his ordered plan of life. He resented it and turned it over in his mind, and eventually, as it always does to men of his kind, his opportunity came. You see, unlike Bewsher and his class, all his days had been an exercise in the recognition and appreciation of chances. He isolated the inevitable fly in the ointment, and in this particular ointment the fly happened to be Bewsher's lack of money and the education the girl had received. She was poor in the way that only the daughter of a great house can be. To Morton, once he was aware of the fly, and once he had combined the knowledge of it with what these two people most lacked, it was a simple thing. They lacked, as you have already guessed, courage and directness. On Morton's side was all the dunder-headism of an aristocracy, all its romanticism, all its gross materialism, all its confusion of ideals. But you mustn't think that he, Morton, was cold or objective in all this: far from it; he was desperately in love with the girl himself, and he was playing his game like a man in a corner — all his wits about him, but fever in his heart.

“There was the situation, an old one — a girl who dare not marry a poor man, and a poor man cracking his brains to know where to get money from. I dare say Bewsher never questioned the rightness of it all — he was too much in love with the girl, his own training had been too similar. And Morton, hovering on the outskirts, talked — to weak people the most fatal doctrine in the world — the doctrine of power, the doctrine that each man and woman can have just what they want if they will only get out and seek it. That's true for the big people; for the small it usually spells death. They falter on methods. They are too afraid of unimportant details. His insistence had its results even more speedily than he

had hoped. Before long the girl, too, was urging Bewsher on to effort. It isn't the first time goodness has sent weakness to the devil. Meanwhile the instigator dropped from his one-time position of tentative lover to that of adviser in particular. It was just the position that at the time he most desired.

"Things came to a head on a warm night in April. Bewsher dropped in upon Morton in his chambers. Very handsome he looked, too, I dare say, in his evening clothes, with an opera-coat thrown back from his shoulders. I remember well myself his grand air, with a touch of cavalry swagger about it. I've no doubt he leaned against the chimney-piece and tapped his leg with his stick. And the upshot of it was that he wanted money. "Oh, no! not a loan. It wasn't as bad as that. He had enough to screw along with himself; although he was frightfully in debt. He wanted a big sum. An income. To make money, that was. He didn't want to go into business if he could help it; hadn't any ability that way; hated it. But perhaps Morton could put him in the way of something? He didn't mind chances."

"Do you see?" Sir John leaned forward. "And he never realized the vulgarity of it—that product of five centuries, that English gentleman. Never realized the vulgarity of demanding of life something for nothing; of asking from a man as a free gift what that man had sweated for and starved for all his life; yes, literally, all his life. It was an illumination, as Morton said, upon that pitiful thing we call 'class.' He demanded all this as his right, too; demanded power, the one precious possession. Well, the other man had his code as well, and the first paragraph in it was that a man shall get only what he works for. Can you imagine him, the little ugly man, sitting at his table and thinking all this? And suddenly he got to his feet. 'Yes,' he said, 'I'll make you a rich man.' But he didn't say he would keep him one. That was the third high light—the little man standing where all through the ages had stood men like him, the

secret movers of the world, while before them, supplicating, had passed the beauty and the pride of their times. In the end they all beg at the feet of power — the kings and the fighting men. And yet, although this was the great, hidden triumph of his life, and, moreover, beyond his hopes a realization of the game he had been playing — for it put Bewsher, you see, utterly in his power — Morton said at the moment it made him a little sick. It was too crude; Bewsher's request too unashamed; it made suddenly too cheap, since men could ask for it so lightly, all the stakes for which he, Morton, had sacrificed the slow minutes and hours of his life. And then, of course, there was this as well: Bewsher had been to Morton an ideal, and ideals can't die, even the memory of them, without some pain."

Mrs. Malcolm, watching with lips a little parted, said to herself: "He has uncoiled too much."

"Yes"—Sir John reached out his hand and, picking up a long-stemmed rose from the table, began idly to twist it in his fingers. "And that was the end. From then on the matter was simple. It was like a duel between a trained swordsman and a novice; only it wasn't really a duel at all, for one of the antagonists was unaware that he was fighting. I suppose that most people would call it unfair. I have wondered. And yet Bewsher, in a polo game, or in the game of social life, would not have hesitated to use all the skill and craft he knew. But, you say, he would not have played against beginners. Well, he had asked himself into this game; he had not been invited. And so, all through that spring and into the summer and autumn the three-cornered contest went on, and into the winter and on to the spring beyond. Unwittingly, the girl was playing more surely than ever into Morton's hand. The increasing number of Bewsher's platitudes about wealth, about keeping up tradition, about religion, showed that. He even talked vaguely about giving up the army and going into business. 'It must have its fascinations, you know,' he remarked

lightly. In the eyes of both of them Morton had become a sort of fairy godfather — a mysterious, wonderful gnome at whose beck gold leaped from the mountain-side. It was just the illusion he wished to create. In the final analysis the figure of the gnome is the most beloved figure in the rotten class to which we belong.

“And then, just as spontaneously as it had come, Bewsher’s money began to melt away — slowly at first; faster afterward until, finally, he was back again to his original income. This was a time of stress, of hurried consultations, of sympathy on the part of Morton, of some rather ugly funk on the part of Bewsher; and Morton realized that in the eyes of the girl he was rapidly becoming once more the dominant figure. It didn’t do him much good” — Sir John broke the stem of the rose between his fingers.

“Soon there was an end to it all. There came, finally, a very unpleasant evening. This too was in April; April a year after Bewsher’s visit to Morton’s chambers, only this time the scene was laid in an office. Bewsher had put a check on the desk. ‘Here,’ he said, ‘that will tide me over until I can get on my feet,’ and his voice was curiously thick; and Morton, looking down, had seen that the signature wasn’t genuine — a clumsy business done by a clumsy man — and, despite all his training, from what he said, a little cold shiver had run up and down his back. This had gone farther than he had planned. But he made no remark, simply pocketed the check, and the next day settled out of his own pockets Bewsher’s sorry affairs; put him back, that is, where he had started, with a small income mortgaged beyond hope. Then he sent a note to the girl requesting an interview on urgent business. She saw him that night in her drawing-room. She was very lovely. Morton was all friendly sympathy. It wasn’t altogether unreal, either. I think, from what he told me, he was genuinely touched. But he felt, you know — the urge, the goad, of his own career. His kind do. Ultimately they are not their own masters. He showed the girl the check — not at first, you understand,

but delicately, after preliminary discussion; reluctantly, upon repeated urging. 'What was he to do? What would she advise?' Bewsher was safe, of course; he had seen to that; but the whole unintelligible, shocking aspect of the thing!' He tore the check up and threw it in the fire. He was not unaware that the girl's eyes admired him. It was a warm night. He said good-by and walked home along the deserted street. He remembered, he told me, how sweet the trees smelled. He was not happy. You see, Bewsher had been the nearest approach to a friend he had ever had.

"That practically finished the sordid business. What the girl said to Bewsher Morton never knew; he trusted to her conventionalized religion and her family pride to break Bewsher's heart, and to Bewsher's sentimentality to eliminate him forever from the scene. In both surmises he was correct; he was only not aware that at the same time the girl had broken her own heart. He found that out afterward. And Bewsher eliminated himself more thoroughly than necessary. I suppose the shame of the thing was to him like a blow to a thoroughbred, instead of an incentive, as it would have been to a man of coarser fibre. He went from bad to worse, resigned from his regiment, finally disappeared. Personally, I had hoped that he had begun again somewhere on the outskirts of the world. But he isn't that sort. There's not much of the Norman king to him except his nose. The girl married Morton. He gave her no time to recover from her gratitude. He felt very happy, he told me, the day of his wedding, very elated. It was one of those rare occasions when he felt that the world was a good place. Another high light, you see. And it was no mean thing, if you consider it, for a man such as he to marry the daughter of a peer, and at the same time to love her. He was not a gentleman, you understand, he could never be that — it was the one secret thing that always hurt him — no amount of brains, no amount of courage could

make him what he wasn't; he never lied to himself as most men do; so he had acquired a habit of secretly triumphing over those who possessed the gift. The other thing that hurt him was when, a few months later, he discovered that his wife still loved Bewsher and always would. And that"—Sir John picked up the broken rose again—"is, I suppose, the end of the story."

There was a moment's silence and then Burnaby lifted his pointed chin. "By George!" he said, "it is interesting to know how things really happen, isn't it? But I think—you have, haven't you, left out the real point. Do you—would you mind telling just why you imagine Morton did this thing? Told his secret before all those people? It wasn't like him, was it?"

Sir John slowly lighted another cigarette, and then he turned to Burnaby and smiled. "Yes," he said, "it was extremely like him. Still, it's very clever of you, very clever. Can't you guess? It isn't so very difficult."

"No," said Burnaby, "I can't guess at all."

"Well, then, listen." And to Mrs. Malcolm it seemed as if Sir John had grown larger, had merged in the shadows about him; at least he gave that impression, for he sat up very straight and threw back his shoulders. For a moment he hesitated, then he began. "You must go back to the dinner I was describing," he said—"the dinner in London. I too was intrigued as you are, and when it was over I followed Morton out and walked with him toward his club. And, like you, I asked the question. I think that he had known all along that I suspected; at all events, it is characteristic of the man that he did not try to bluff me. He walked on for a little while in silence, and then he laughed abruptly. 'Yes,' he said, 'I'll tell you. Yes. Just this. What there is to be got, I've got; what work can win I've won; but back of it all there's something else, and back even of that there's a careless god who gives his gifts where they are least deserved. That's one reason why I talked as I did

to-night. To all of us — the men like me — there comes in the end a time when we realize that what a man can do we can do, but that love, the touch of other people's minds, these two things are the gifts of the careless god. And it irritates us, I suppose, irritates us! We want them in a way that the ordinary man who has them cannot understand. We want them as damned souls in hell want water. And sometimes the strain's too much. It was to-night. To touch other minds, even for a moment, even if they hate you while you are doing it, that's the thing! To lay yourself, just once, bare to the gaze of ordinary people! With the hope, perhaps, that even then they may still find in you something to admire or love. Self-revelation! Every man confesses sometime. It happened that I chose a dinner party. Do you understand?' " It was almost as if Sir John himself had asked the question.

"And then"—he was speaking in his usual calm tones again—"there happened a curious thing, a very curious thing, for Morton stopped and turned toward me and began to laugh. I thought he would never stop. It was rather uncanny, under the street lamp there, this usually rather quiet man. 'And that,' he said at length, 'that's only half the story. The cream of it is this: the way I myself felt, sitting there among all those soft, easily lived people. That's the cream of it. To flout them, to sting them, to laugh at them, to know you had more courage than all of them put together, you who were once so afraid of them! To feel that—even if they knew it was about yourself you were talking—that even then they were afraid of you, and would to-morrow ask you back again to their houses. That's power! That's worth doing! After all, you can keep your love and your sympathy and your gentlemen; it's only to men like me, men who've sweated and come up, that moments arise such as I've had to-night.' And then, 'It's rather a pity,' he said, after a pause, 'that of them all you alone knew of whom I was talking. Rather a pity, isn't

it?" Sir John hesitated and looked about the table. "It was unusual, wasn't it?" he said at length gently. "Have I been too dramatic?"

In the little silence that followed, Mrs. Malcolm leaned forward, her eyes starry. "I would rather," she said, "talk to Bewsher in his teepee than talk to Morton with all his money."

Sir John looked at her and smiled — his charming smile. "Oh, no, you wouldn't," he said. "Oh, no! We say those things, but we don't mean them. If you sat next to Morton at dinner you'd like him; but as for Bewsher you'd despise him, as all right-minded women despise a failure. Oh, no; you'd prefer Morton."

"Perhaps you're right," sighed Mrs. Malcolm; "pirates are fascinating, I suppose." She arose to her feet. Out of the shadows Lady Masters advanced to meet her. "She is like a mist," thought Mrs. Malcolm. "Exactly like a rather faint mist."

Burnaby leaned over and lit a cigarette at one of the candles. "And, of course," he said quietly, without raising his head, "the curious thing is that this fellow Morton, despite all his talk of power, in the end is merely a ghost of Bewsher, after all, isn't he?"

Sir John turned and looked at the bowed sleek head with a puzzled expression. "A ghost!" he murmured. "I don't think I quite understand."

"It's very simple," said Burnaby, and raised his head. "Despite all Morton has done, in the things worth while, in the things he wants the most, he can at best be only a shadow of the shadow Bewsher has left — a shadow of a man to the woman who loves Bewsher, a shadow of a friend to the men who liked Bewsher, a shadow of a gentleman to the gentlemen about him. A ghost, in other words. It's the inevitable end of all selfishness. I think Bewsher has rather the best of it, don't you?"

"I — I had never thought of it in quite that light," said Sir John, and followed Mrs. Malcolm.

They went into the drawing-room beyond — across a

hallway, and up a half-flight of stairs, and through glass doors. "Play for us!" said Mrs. Malcolm, and Burnaby, that remarkable young man, sat down to the piano and for perhaps an hour made the chords sob to a strange music, mostly his own.

"That's Bewsher!" he said when he was through, and had sat back on his stool, and was sipping a long-neglected cordial.

"Br-r-r-!" shivered Mrs. Selden from her place by the fire. "How unpleasant you are!"

Sir John looked troubled. "I hope," he said, "my story hasn't depressed you too much. Burnaby's was really worse, you know. Well, I must be going." He turned to Mrs. Malcolm. "You are one of the few women who can make me sit up late."

He bade each in turn good-night in his suave, charming, slightly Hebraic manner. To Burnaby he said: "Thank you for the music. Improvisation is perhaps the happiest of gifts."

But Burnaby for once was awkward. He was watching Sir John's face with the curious, intent look of a forest animal that so often possessed his long, dark eyes. Suddenly he remembered himself. "Oh, yes," he said hastily, "I beg your pardon. Thanks, very much."

"Good-night!" Sir John and Lady Masters passed through the glass doors.

Burnaby paused a moment where he had shaken hands, and then, with the long stride characteristic of him, went to the window and, drawing aside the curtain, peered into the darkness beyond. He stood listening until the purr of a great motor rose and died on the snow-muffled air. "He's gone!" he said, and turned back into the room. He spread his arms out and dropped them to his sides. "Swastika!" he said. "And God keep us from the evil eye!"

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Malcolm.

"Sir John," said Burnaby. "He has 'a bad heart.'"

"Stop talking your Indian talk and tell us what you mean."

Burnaby balanced himself on the hearth. "Am I to understand you don't know?" he asked. "Well, Morton's Masters, and 'the girl's' Lady Masters, and Bewsher — well, he's just a squawman."

"I don't believe it!" said Mrs. Malcolm. "He wouldn't dare."

"Wouldn't dare?" Burnaby laughed shortly. "My dear Minna, he'd dare anything if it gave him a sense of power."

"But why — why did he choose us? We're not so important as all that?"

"Because — well, Bewsher's name came up. Because, well, you heard what he said — self-revelation — men who had sweated. Because —" suddenly Burnaby took a step forward and his jaw shot out — "because that shadow of his, that wife of his, broke a champagne-glass when I said Geoffrey Boisselier Bewsher; broke her champagne-glass and, I've no doubt, cried out loud in her heart. Power can't buy love — no; but power can stamp to death anything that won't love it. That's Masters. I can tell a timber-wolf far off. Can you see him now in his motor? He'll have turned the lights out, and she — his wife — will be looking out of the window at the snow. All you can see of him would be his nose and his beard and the glow of his cigar — except his smile. You could see that when the car passed a corner lamp, couldn't you?"

"I don't believe it yet," said Mrs. Malcolm. "It's too preposterous."